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MINUTEMEN SCANS

MARVEL COMICS

X-CUTIONER'S SONG

PART 12

X-FORCE

THE FINAL CHAPTER!

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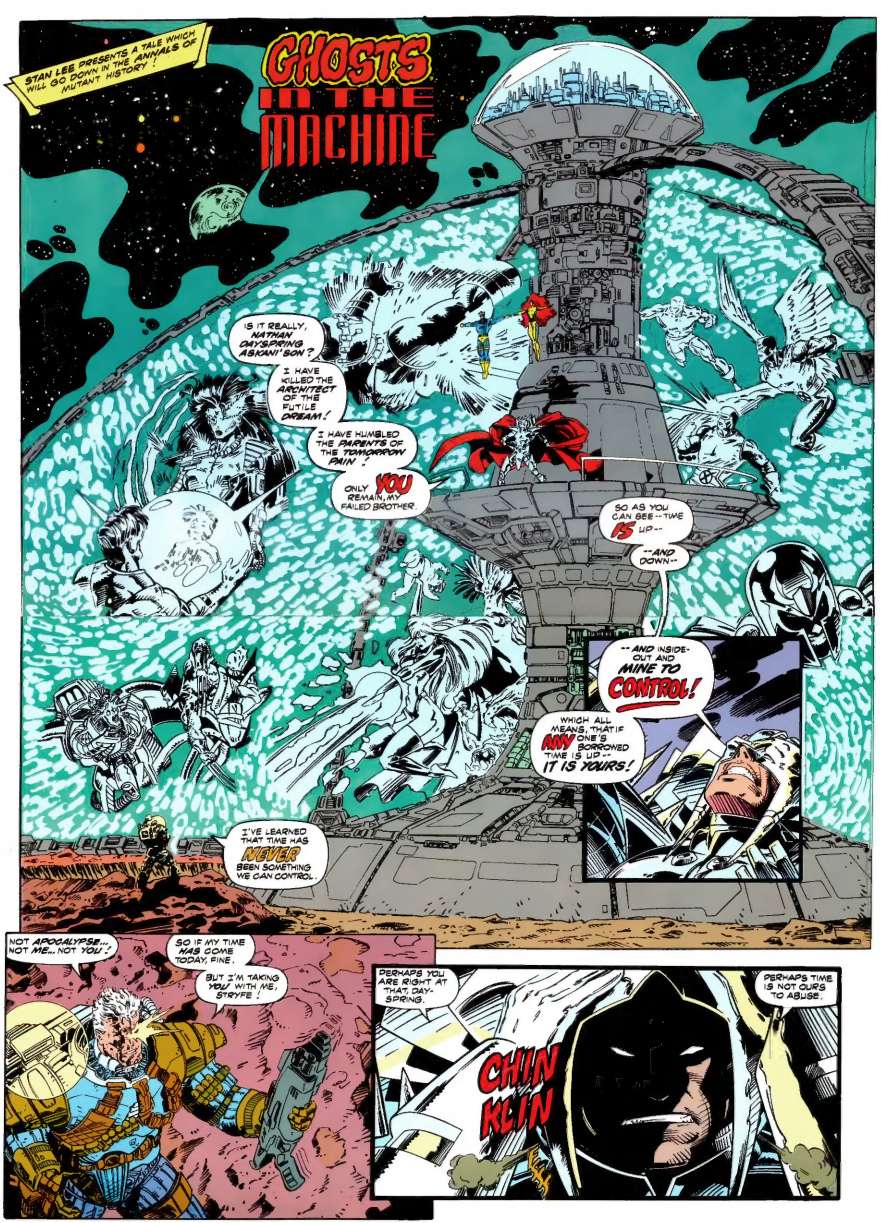
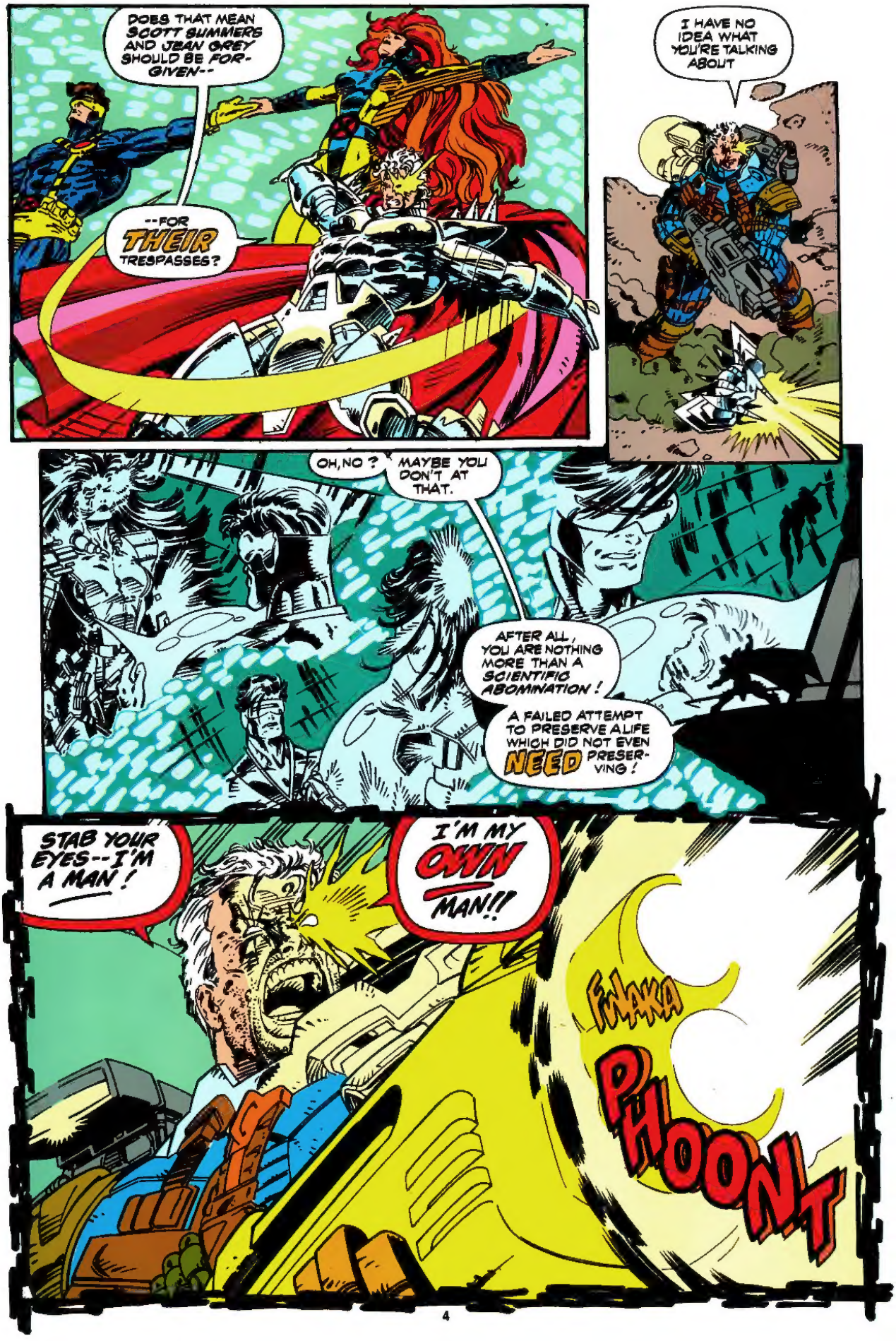
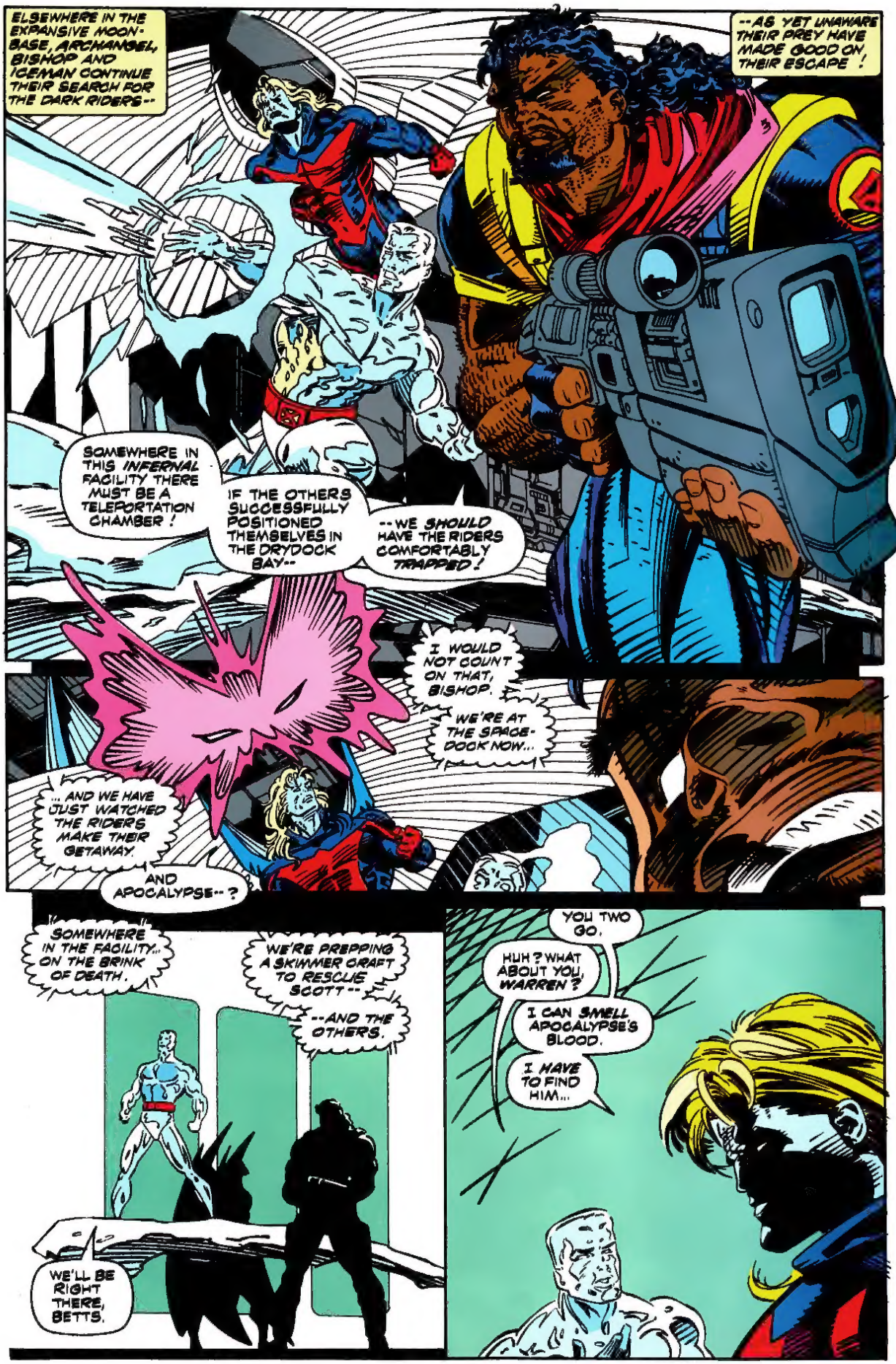

STAN LEE PRESENTS A TALE WHICH WILL GO DOWN IN THE ANNALS OF MUTANT HISTORY.
GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE
IS IT REALLY, NATHAN DAYSPRING ASKANI'SON?
I HAVE KILLED THE ARCHITECT OF THE FUTILE DREAM!
I HAVE HUMBLED THE PARENTS OF THE TOMORROW PAIN!
ONLY YOU REMAIN, MY FAILED BROTHER.
SO AS YOU CAN SEE--TIME IS UP--
--AND DOWN--
--AND INSIDE-OUT AND MINE TO CONTROL!
WHICH ALL MEANS, THAT IF ANY ONE'S BORROWED TIME IS UP--
IT IS YOURS!
I'VE LEARNED THAT TIME HAS NEVER BEEN SOMETHING WE CAN CONTROL.
NOT APOCALYPSE... NOT ME... NOT YOU!
SO IF MY TIME HAS COME TODAY, FINE.
BUT I'M TAKING YOU WITH ME, STRYFE!
PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT AT THAT, DAY-SPRING.
CHIN KIN
PERHAPS TIME IS NOT OURS TO ABUSE.


DOES THAT MEAN SCOTT SUMMERS AND JEAN GREY SHOULD BE FOR-GIVEN--
--FOR THEIR TRESPASSES?
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT
OH, NO ?
MAYBE YOU DON'T AT THAT.
AFTER ALL, YOU ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A SCIENTIFIC ABOMINATION !
A FAILED ATTEMPT TO PRESERVE A LIFE WHICH DID NOT EVEN NEED PRESER-VING !
STAB YOUR EYES--I'M A MAN !
I'M MY OWN MAN!!
FLAKA
PHOONT

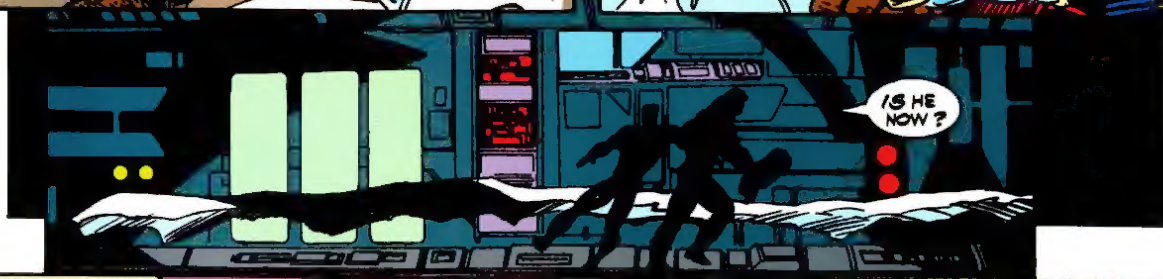
KRAKOW!
SHEEEZA
AH, HAVE I TOUCHED A CHORD WITHIN YOU, DAYSPRING?
PERHAPS YOU REALIZE--
-- DEEP INSIDE--
-- THAT I AM THE WHOLE SUM OF OUR PARTS--
--AND YOU--
--YOU ARE NOTHING!
YOU SON OF A %*$#--!!
AH, TRUER WORDS HAVE NEVER BEEN SPOKEN.
SCOTT, WHAT CHANCE DOES CABLE HAVE...
...ALONE...
...AGAINST THAT MADMAN...?!
I DON'T KNOW, JEAN...
...BUT I'M BEGINNING TO DOUBT IF STRYFE REALLY IS AS MAD AS HE SEEMS...
...MAYBE IF WE CAN FIND OUT WHAT TWISTED HIM...

"...WE CAN END THIS MADNESS."
MILES AWAY, WITHIN THE DRYDOCK FACILITY OF THE MOONBASE, A SPACE CRAFT SOARS AWAY--
--AS BELOW, THE X-MEN STORM, WOLVERINE AND PSYLOCKE MAKE A PAINFULLY OBVIOUS OBSERVATION...
WE ARE TOO LATE. THE DARK RIDERS HAVE EFFECTED THEIR ESCAPE IN THAT STAR SHUTTLE.
TWO GROUPS OF X-MEN AFTER 'EM AN' WE COULDN'T STOP 'EM?
WE'VE BEEN ONE STEP BEHIND FOR TOO LONG, ORORO!
STRYFE, CHARLIE-- SHIVA, MARIKO--
--I'M SICK OF IT!
LOGAN-- MY FRIEND-- I UNDERSTAND, BUT WE MUST ACCEPT WHAT IS DONE... FOR NOW.
ELISABETH, APOCALYPSE WAS IN SOLE PURSUIT OF THE RIDERS. WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HIM?
I'M SCANNING FOR HIM NOW.
I CAN BARELY PERCEIVE HIS THOUGHTS.
HE DID ENCOUNTER THE DARK RIDERS-- AND IN HIS WEAKENED CONDITION-- HE WAS OVERWHELMED... NO...
LOGAN, ORORO--
--APOCALYPSE IS DYING!

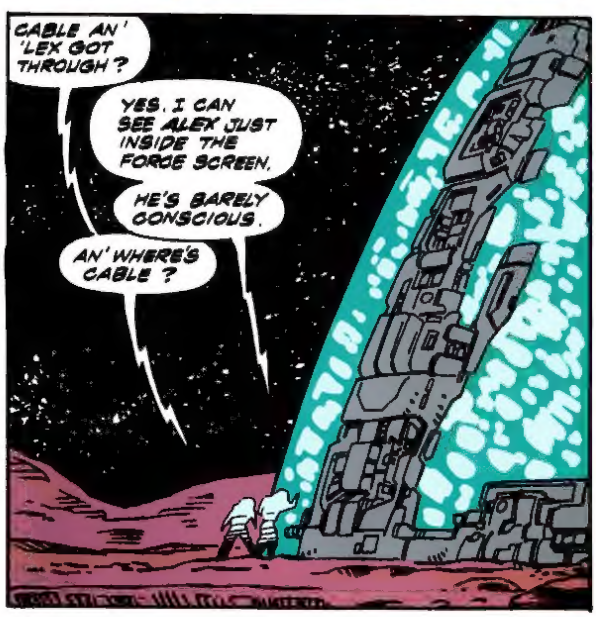

ELSEWHERE IN THE EXPANSIVE MOON-BASE, ARCHANGEL, BISHOP AND ICEMAN CONTINUE THEIR SEARCH FOR THE DARK RIDERS--
--AS YET UNAWARE THEIR PREY HAVE MADE GOOD ON THEIR ESCAPE!
SOMEWHERE IN THIS INFERNAL FACILITY THERE MUST BE A TELEPORTATION CHAMBER!
IF THE OTHERS SUCCESSFULLY POSITIONED THEMSELVES IN THE DRYDOCK BAY--
--WE SHOULD HAVE THE RIDERS COMFORTABLY TRAPPED!
I WOULD NOT COUNT ON THAT, BISHOP.
WE'RE AT THE SPACE-DOCK NOW...
... AND WE HAVE JUST WATCHED THE RIDERS MAKE THEIR GETAWAY.
AND APOCALYPSE--?
SOMEWHERE IN THE FACILITY... ON THE BRINK OF DEATH.
WE'RE PREPPING A SKIMMER CRAFT TO RESCUE SCOTT--
--AND THE OTHERS.
WE'LL BE RIGHT THERE, BETTS.
YOU TWO GO.
HUH? WHAT ABOUT YOU, WARREN?
I CAN SMELL APOCALYPSE'S BLOOD.
I HAVE TO FIND HIM...

... AND MAKE HIS DYING MOMENTS AS MISERABLE AS I POSSIBLY CAN!
WARREN!
FOR THE LUVVA PETE, COME BACK!!
COME, DRAKE. FORGET ABOUT ARCHANGEL.

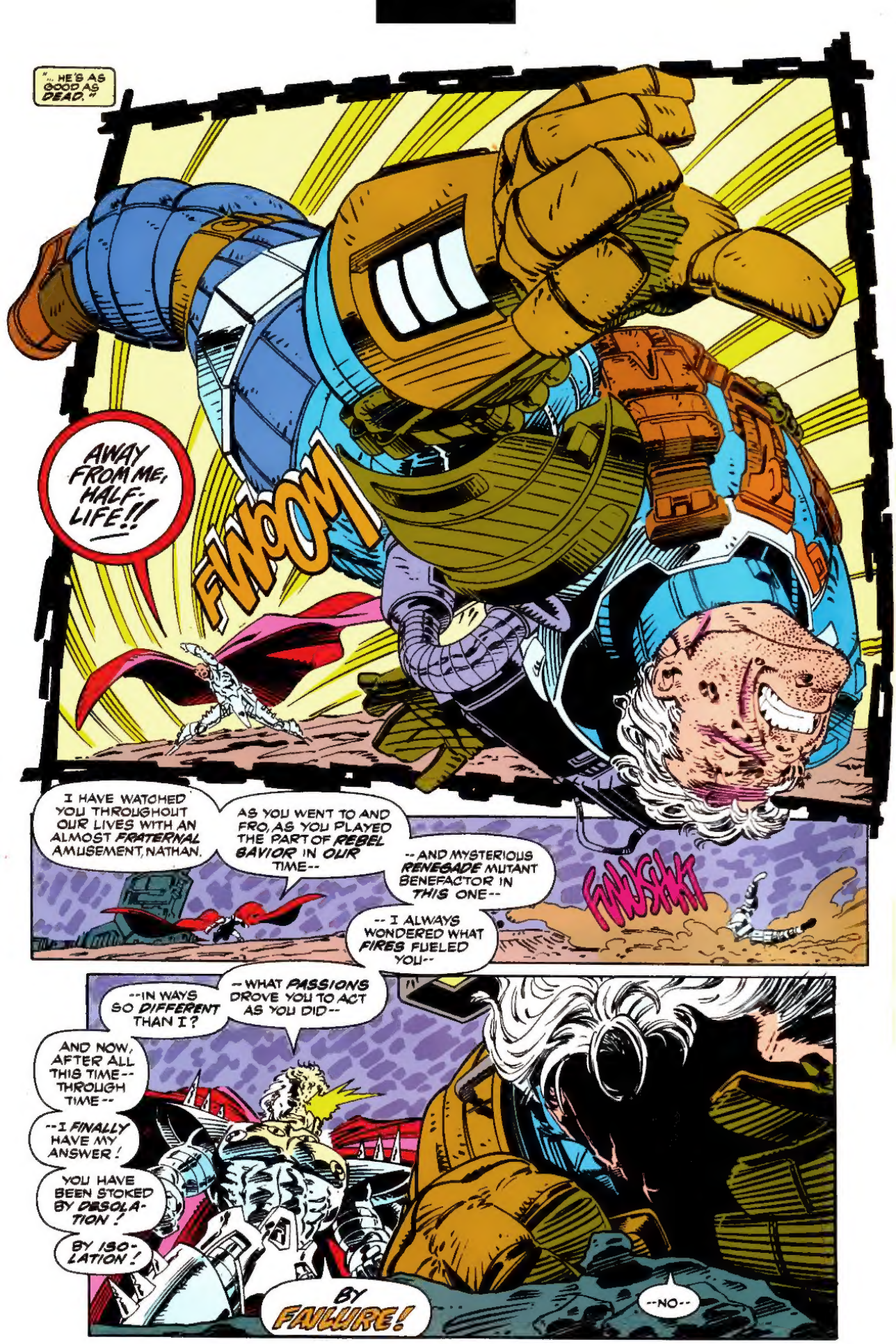
BETTER SEE WHAT WE CAN DO FOR THE LIVING.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, BISHOP? WARREN IS THE LIVING!

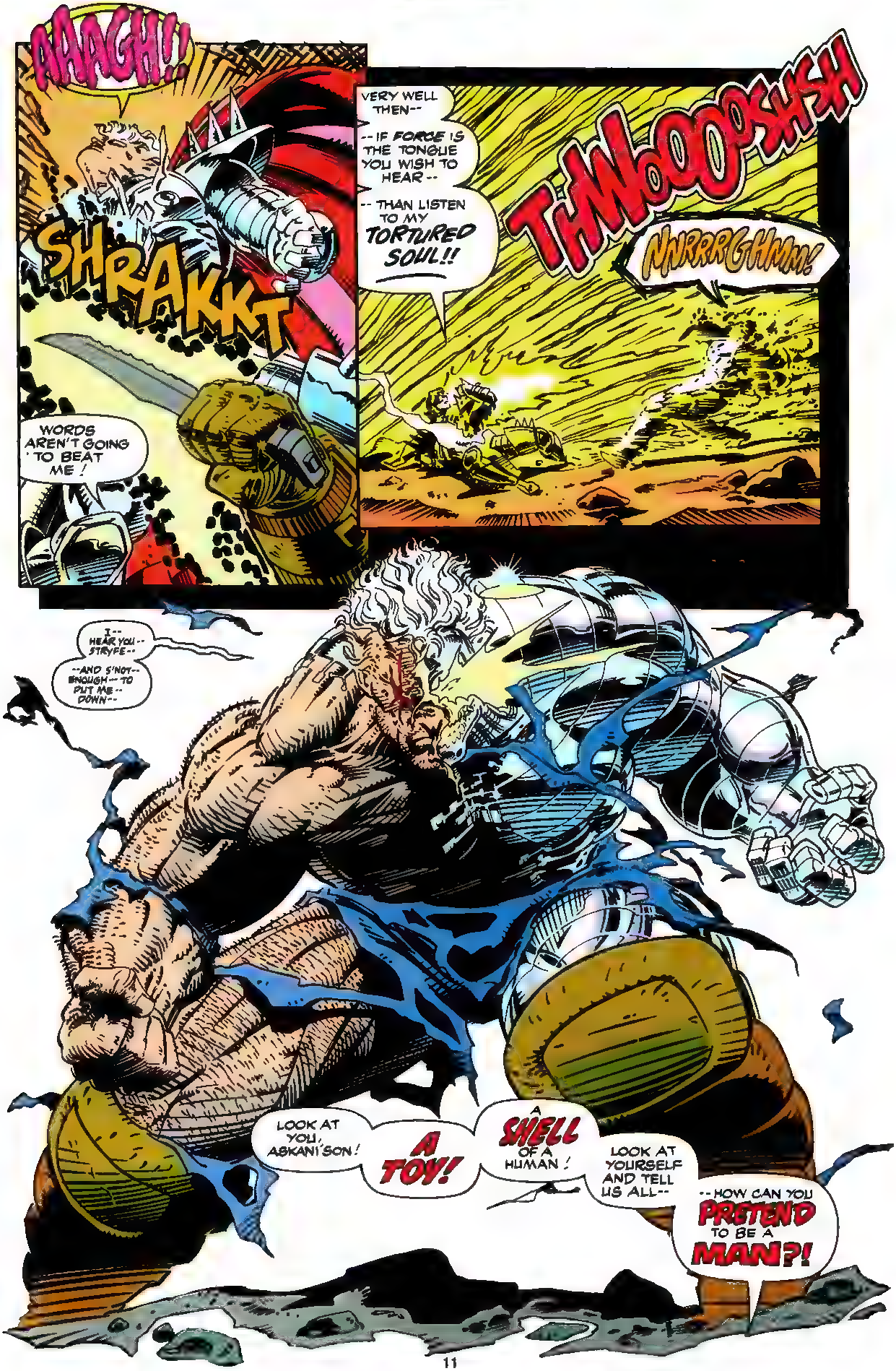

IS HE NOW?

ON THE LUNAR SURFACE, JUST BEYOND THE PERIMETERS OF STRYFE'S TIME-VORTEX FIELD...
SAM... YOU OKAY--?
YEAH, IF GETTIN' KICKED IN THE HEAD BY A MULE IS YOUR IDEA O' OKAY, LORNA.


CABLE AN' 'LEX GOT THROUGH?
YES. I CAN SEE ALEX JUST INSIDE THE FORCE SCREEN.
HE'S BARELY CONSCIOUS.
AN' WHERE'S CABLE?

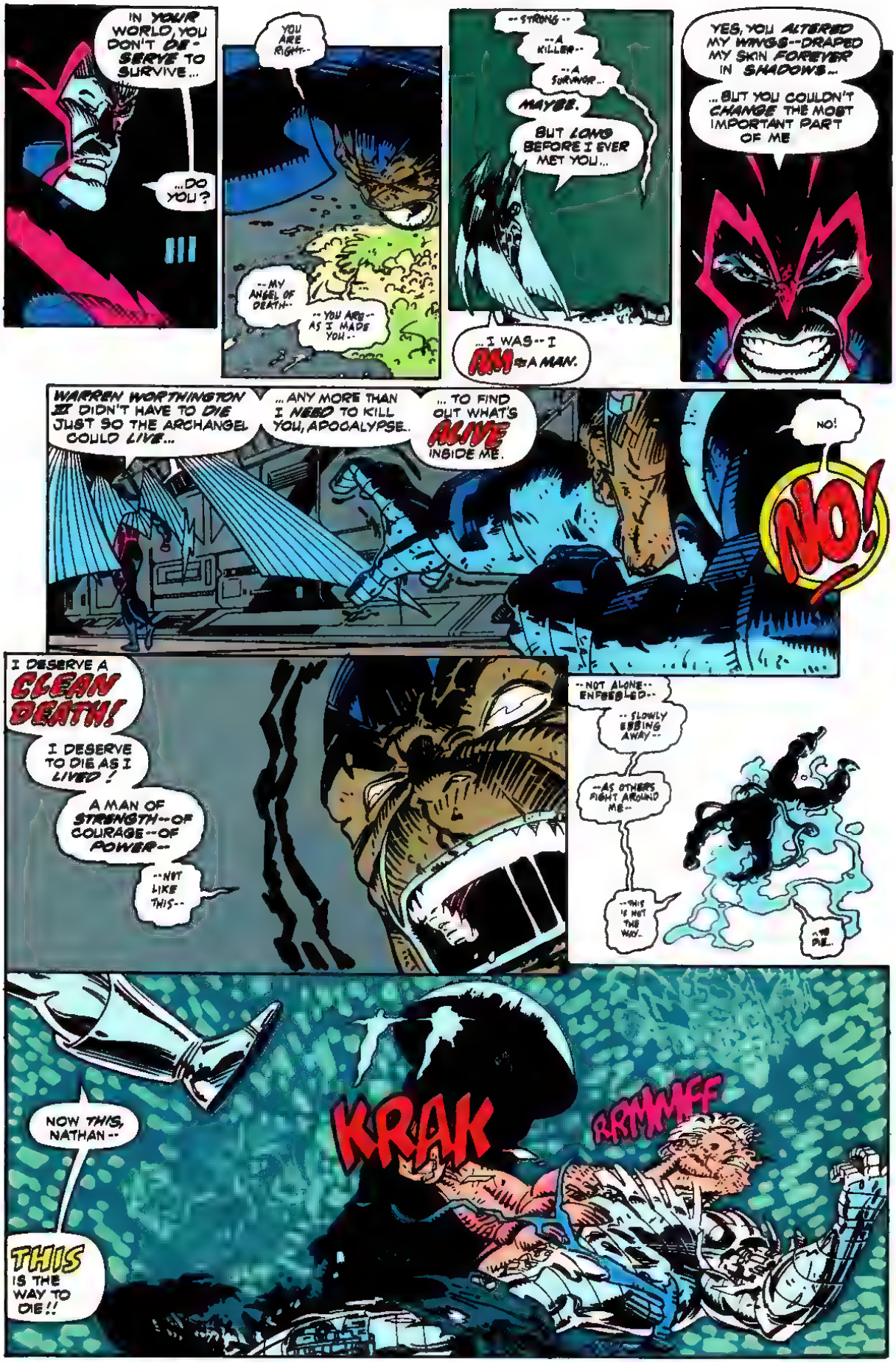
I'M AFRAID HE'S FIGHTING STRYFE-- ALONE.
OH. THEN AH GUESS...


"... HE'S AS GOOD AS DEAD."
AWAY FROM ME, HALF-LIFE!!
FWOOM
I HAVE WATCHED YOU THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES WITH AN ALMOST FRATERNAL AMUSEMENT, NATHAN.
AS YOU WENT TO AND FRO, AS YOU PLAYED THE PART OF REBEL SAVIOR IN OUR TIME--
--AND MYSTERIOUS RENEGADE MUTANT BENEFACTOR IN THIS ONE--
FWSHKT
-- I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT FIRES FUELED YOU--
--WHAT PASSIONS DROVE YOU TO ACT AS YOU DID--
--IN WAYS SO DIFFERENT THAN I?
AND NOW, AFTER ALL THIS TIME -- THROUGH TIME --
--I FINALLY HAVE MY ANSWER!
YOU HAVE BEEN STOKED BY DESOLATION!
BY ISOLATION!
BY FAILURE!
--NO--

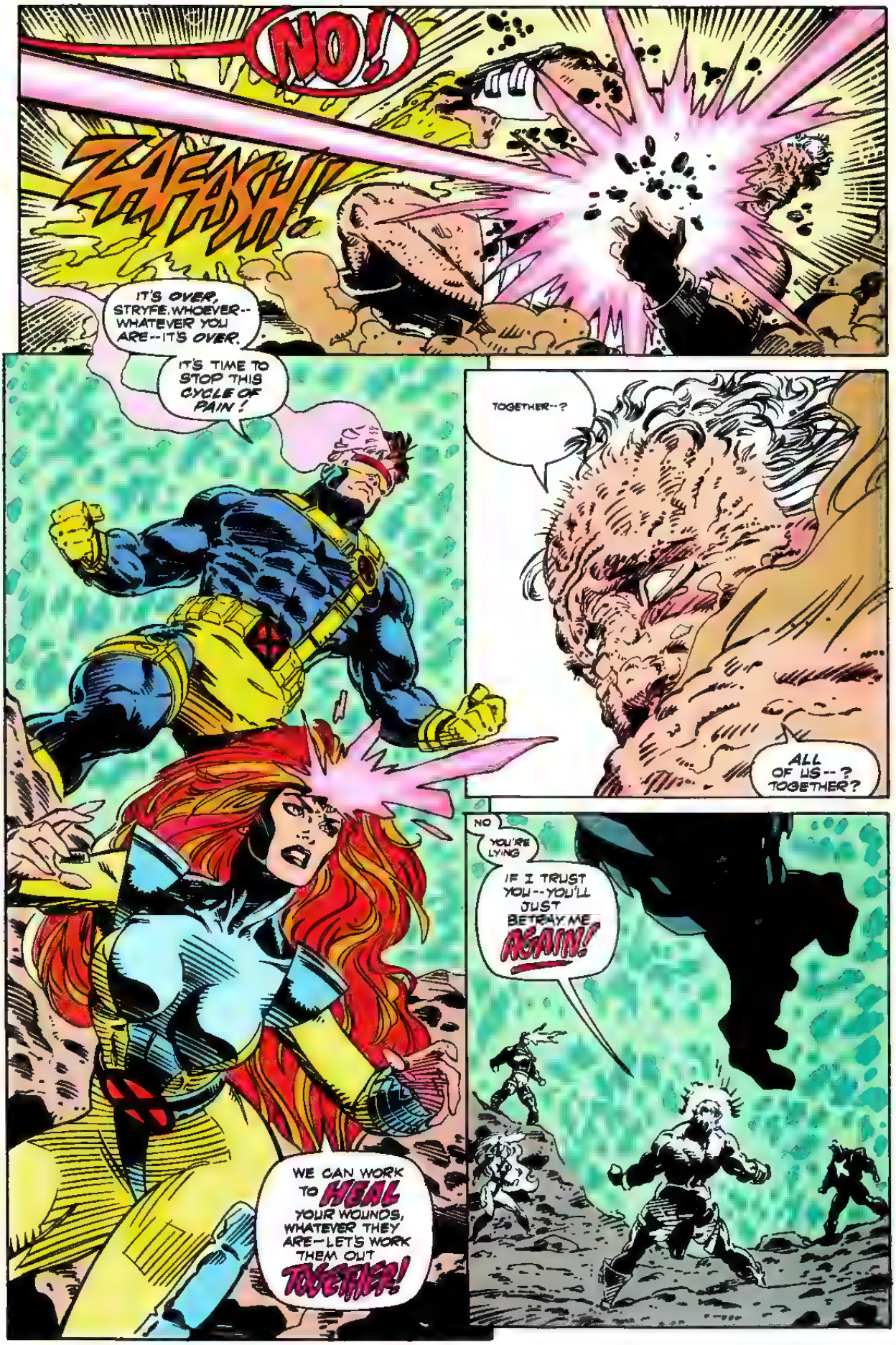

AAAGH!!
SHRAKKT
WORDS AREN'T GOING TO BEAT ME!
VERY WELL THEN--
--IF FORCE IS THE TONGUE YOU WISH TO HEAR--
--THAN LISTEN TO MY TORTURED SOUL!!
THWOOPSHSH
NNRRRGHMM!
I-- HEAR YOU-- STRYFE--
--AND S'NOT-- ENOUGH-- TO PUT ME-- DOWN--
LOOK AT YOU, ASKANI'SON!
A TOY!
A SHELL OF A HUMAN!
LOOK AT YOURSELF AND TELL US ALL--
--HOW CAN YOU PRETEND TO BE A MAN?!

XAVIER'S MANSION IN WESTCHESTER, NEW YORK.
NNOOOOO
GEEZ!
SCARE THE LIVIN' BEEGEEZUS OUTTA ME, WHY DON'TCHA?!
PROFESSOR-- IT'S HENRY.
YOUR FEVER HAS BROKEN, YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HANK--
--FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, IN MY FEVERED STATE--
--I WAS ABLE TO READ ALL THEIR MINDS-- THERE ON THE MOON-- MY X-MEN AND THE OTHERS--
--AND I SAW ALL THE MISTAKES WE'VE MADE--
--MISTAKES BORNE OF OUR DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES--
--OF HOPE AND DESPAIR--
--OF FATHERS AND SONS--
--ALL THESE MISTAKES ARE WEAVING TOGETHER UP THERE--TO FORM A TRAGIC DESTINY--
--AND THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO TO STOP IT!
EASY NOW, IT'LL ALL WORK OUT. DESPITE THE ODDS, THE X-MEN ALWAYS PULL THROUGH.
BUT THERE IS ALWAYS A COST-- ALWAYS...
--AND WHAT IF THIS TIME--
--THE COST IS SCOTT AND JEAN'S LIFE--?!
BEAUSE THAT IS WHAT IT IS GOING TO COME DOWN TO, HANK!
HEAVEN HELP US ALL -- THAT IS THE ONLY THING WHICH WILL END THIS INSANITY!

INSIDE THE MOONBASE...
... MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH CONTINUE TO BE SETTLED.
HAUFF
WELL DONE
HAAGHK
WELL FOUGHT
SO I DIE
FHUGH
AS I HAVE LIVED
AS MY "FATHER" MADE ME, APOCALYPSE.
LIVING TO DIE. DYING TO LIVE.
DOES THAT LEAVE ME TO FOLLOW YOUR EXAMPLE?
THUNK
MY SON--?
YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT
NO--
HWAURGHUGNFF
I--DO NOT--
YOU ARE NOT STRONG, APOCALYPSE.
YOU ARE NOT FIT.


IN YOUR WORLD, YOU DON'T DESERVE TO SURVIVE...
...DO YOU?
YOU ARE RIGHT--
--MY ANGEL OF DEATH--
--YOU ARE-- AS I MADE YOU--
--STRONG--
--A KILLER--
--A SURVIVOR...
MAYBE.
BUT LONG BEFORE I EVER MET YOU...
...I WAS--I AM A MAN.
YES, YOU ALTERED MY WINGS--DRAPED MY SKIN FOREVER IN SHADOWS...
...BUT YOU COULDN'T CHANGE THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF ME
WARREN WORTHINGTON III DIDN'T HAVE TO DIE JUST SO THE ARCHANGEL COULD LIVE...
...ANY MORE THAN I NEED TO KILL YOU, APOCALYPSE.
...TO FIND OUT WHAT'S ALIVE INSIDE ME.
NO!
NO!
I DESERVE A CLEAN DEATH!
I DESERVE TO DIE AS I LIVED!
A MAN OF STRENGTH--OF COURAGE--OF POWER--
--NOT LIKE THIS--
--NOT ALONE-- ENFEEBLED--
--SLOWLY EBBING AWAY--
--AS OTHERS FIGHT AROUND ME--
--THIS IS NOT THE WAY--
--I'M DYING--
NOW THIS, NATHAN--
THIS IS THE WAY TO DIE!!
KRAK
RRMMMFF

JEAN, WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING. CABLE CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE!
I KNOW! THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THE MORE STRYFE CONCENTRATES ON CABLE--
--THE WEAKER OUR TELEKINETIC BONDS BECOME.
IF STRYFE REMAINS OCCUPIED--AND THAT'S A BIG IF--
--I SHOULD BE ABLE TO BREAK US FREE--
FASHAM
AAAGH--!
PLASMA BLAST--? WHO--?
YOU RELISH DEALING IN PAIN, DON'T YOU, STRYFE?
WELL, STOP CRYING FOUL AND JUST CRY HAVOK!
AH, MY MISTAKE.
MY GENETIC MATRIX SHIELD WAS PROGRAMMED FOR THE SUMMERS DNA--
--I HAD NOT CONSIDERED IT WOULD ALLOW THE BROTHER THROUGH.
WELL, IT DID--KICKED ME PRETTY HARD FOR NOT BEING SCOTT--
--BUT I'VE ALWAYS DONE A GOOD JOB OF THAT MYSELF.
IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ANYONE WHO BEARS THE NAME OF SUMMERS MUST PAY FOR IT, DOESN'T IT?
SOME PAY WITH THEIR LIVES...
...YOU, ALEX SUMMERS, WILL PAY WITH YOUR DEATH!


NO!
ZAFASH!
IT'S OVER, STRYFE. WHOEVER-- WHATEVER YOU ARE--IT'S OVER.
IT'S TIME TO STOP THIS CYCLE OF PAIN!
TOGETHER--?
ALL OF US--? TOGETHER?
NO
YOU'RE LYING
IF I TRUST YOU--YOU'LL JUST BETRAY ME AGAIN!
WE CAN WORK TO HEAL YOUR WOUNDS, WHATEVER THEY ARE--LET'S WORK THEM OUT TOGETHER!

I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU.
I DO.
BUT HOW CAN I ?

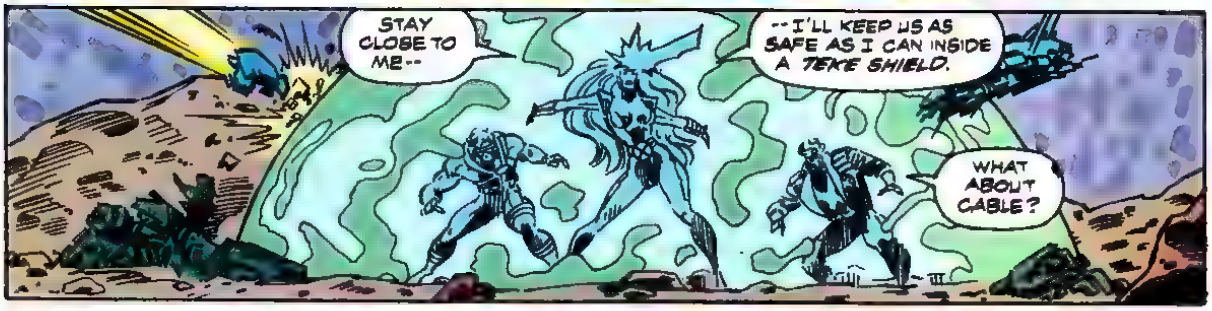
WHY AM I SUFFERING THIS WAY ?

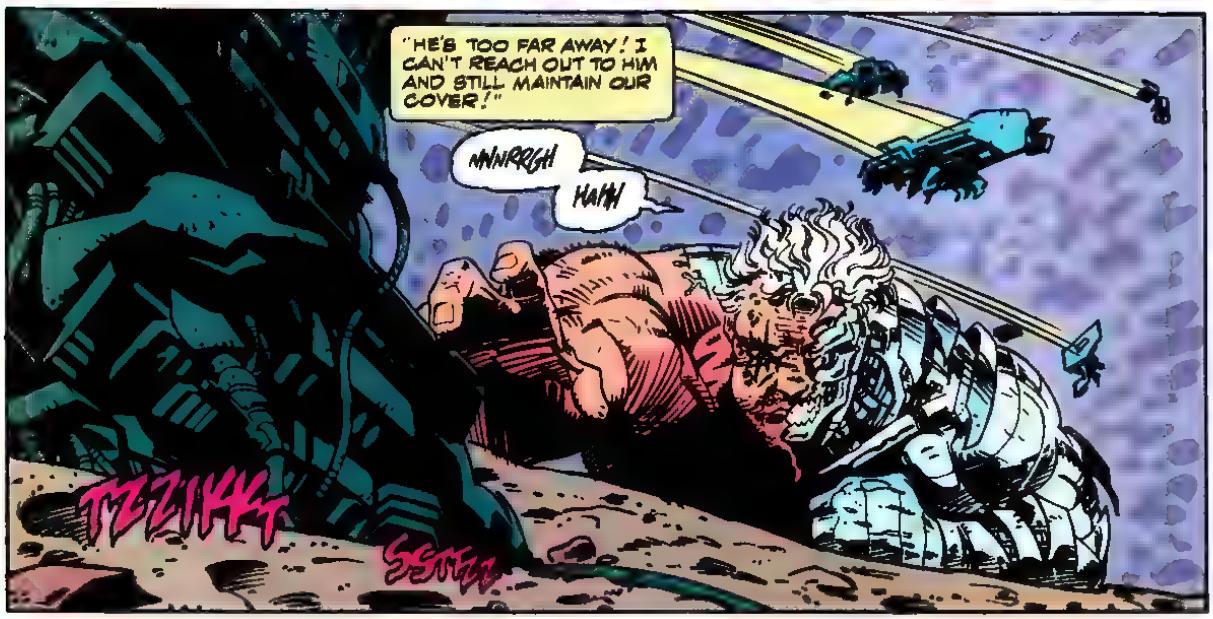
ISM
NOT THE GUILTY ONE !

BRRRRMMM

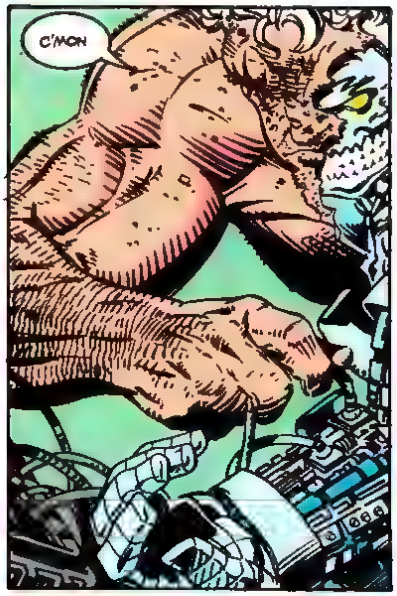
"--AN' WE'RE STUCK ON THE OUTSIDE, LOOKIN' IN!"
LOOK AT ME WITH PLEADING EYES!
ASK ME FOR HELP!
ASK ME TO BE YOUR SALVATION!
ASK ME!

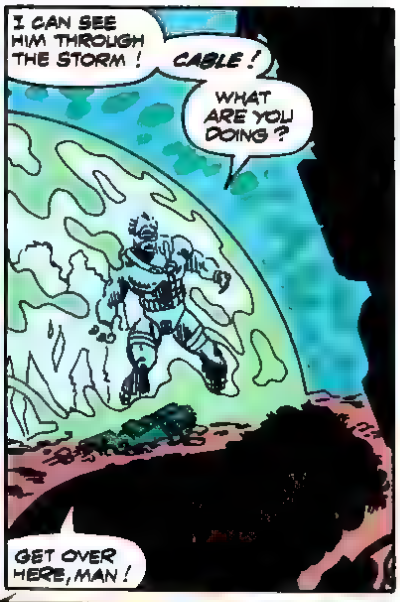
HE'S DISMANTLED THE ENTIRE TOWER!
BUT HE NEVER BOTHERED TO TURN OFF THE MACHINERY!
THE AMOUNT OF ELECTROMAGNETIC ENERGY SPINNING AROUND IN HERE IS PHENOMENAL!


STAY CLOSE TO ME--
--I'LL KEEP US AS SAFE AS I CAN INSIDE A TEKE SHIELD.
WHAT ABOUT CABLE?

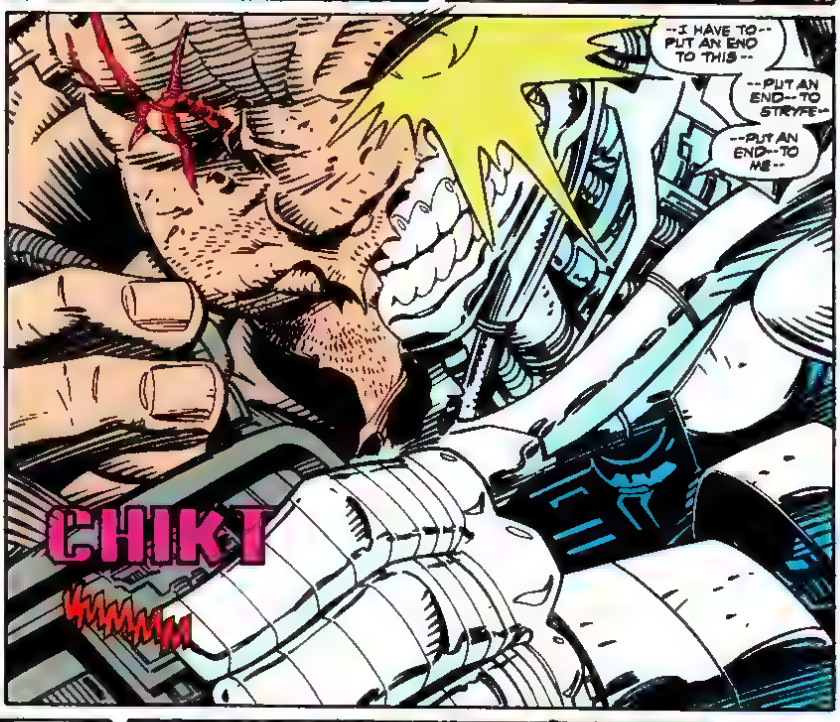

"HE'S TOO FAR AWAY! I CAN'T REACH OUT TO HIM AND STILL MAINTAIN OUR COVER!"
NNNRRGH
HAHH
TZZIKK
SSTTT

FWOOM
CHIKKA CHIKKA
FZZZT
FZZZT
TZZZT
C'MON


C'MON

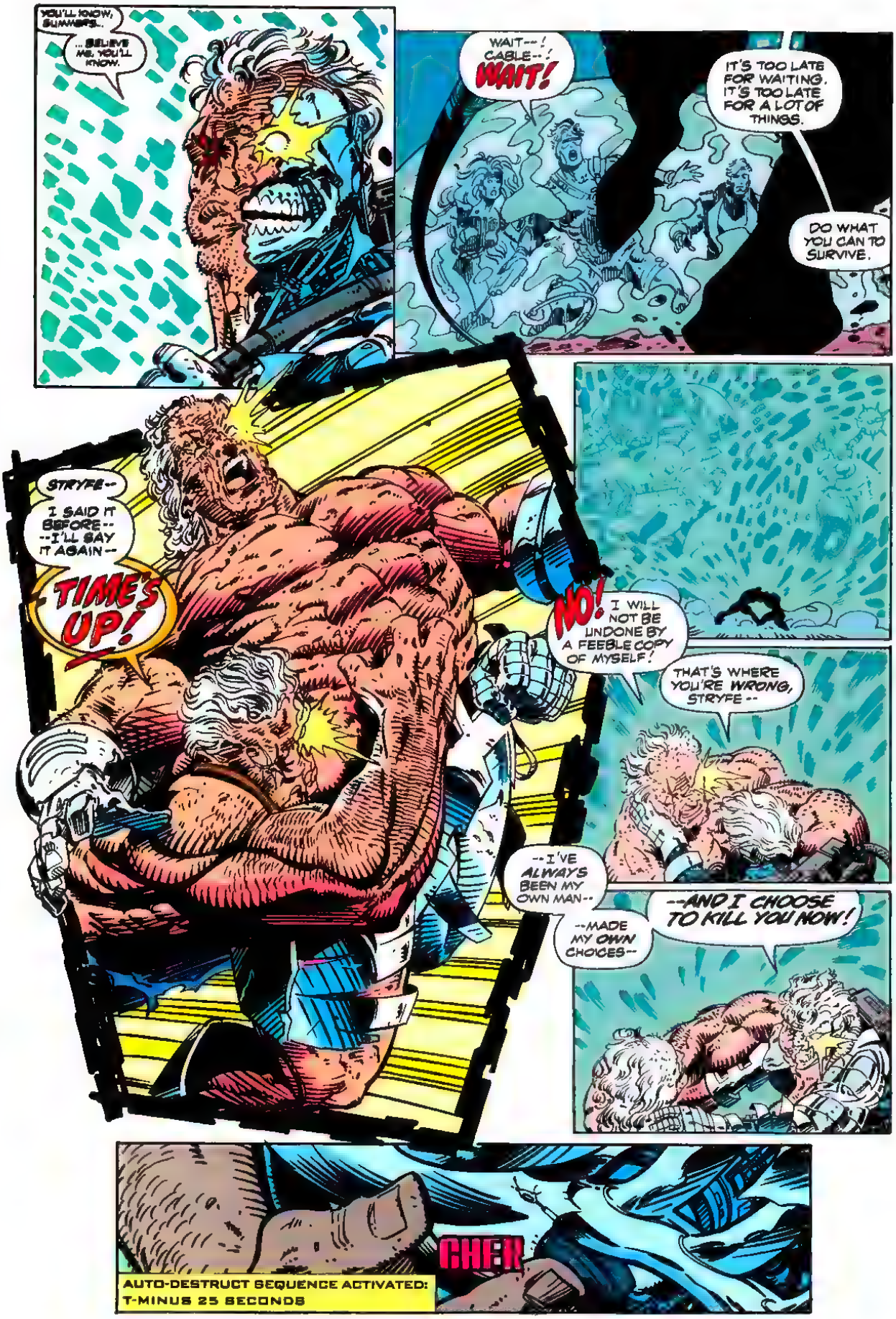

I CAN SEE HIM THROUGH THE STORM !
CABLE !
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?
GET OVER HERE, MAN !

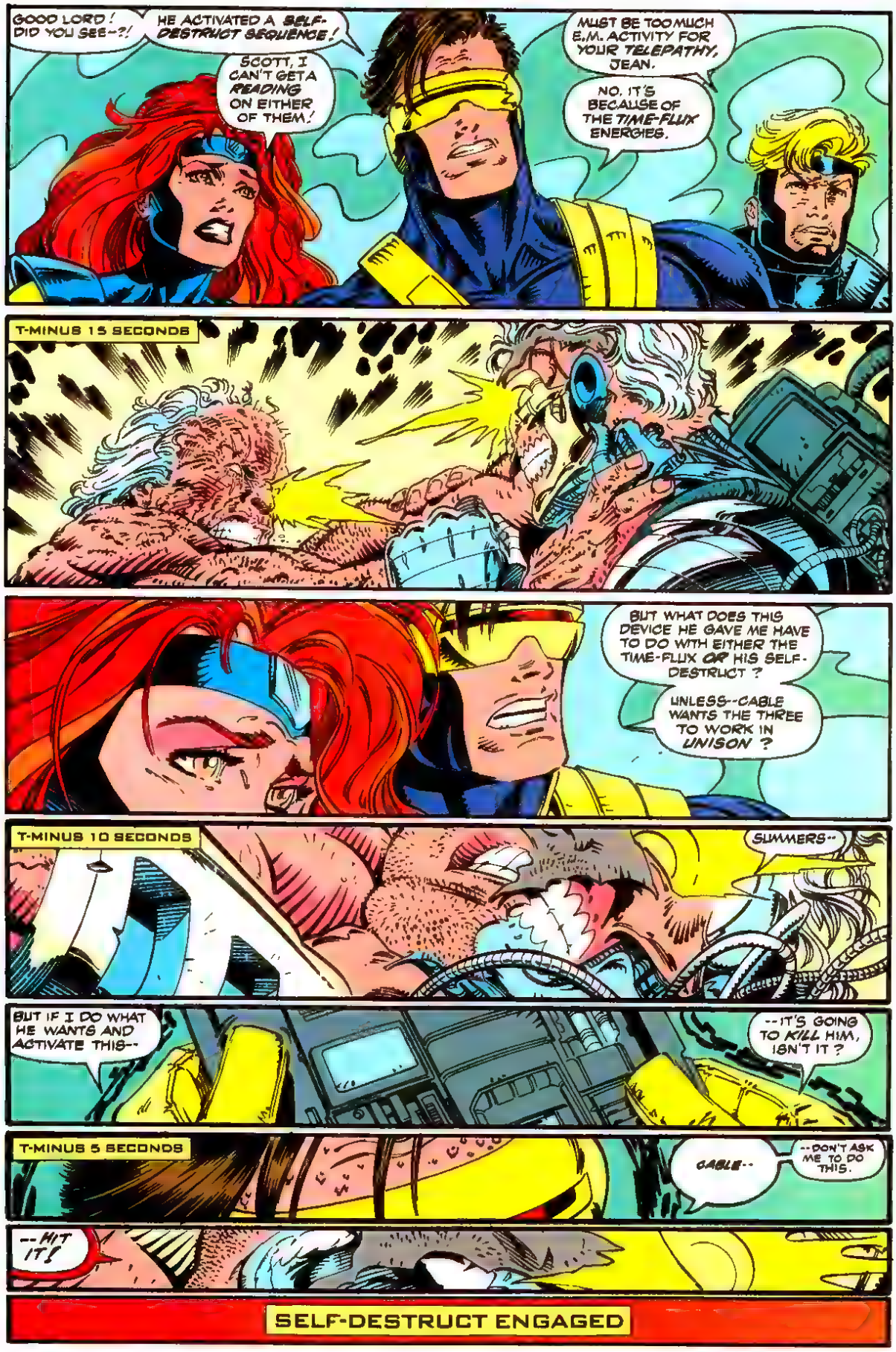
CAN'T.
I'M PUTTING AN END TO THIS, SUMMERS! --
--IF WHAT-- WE LEARNED TODAY-- S TRUE --
--AN' I DON'T KNOW-- IF IT

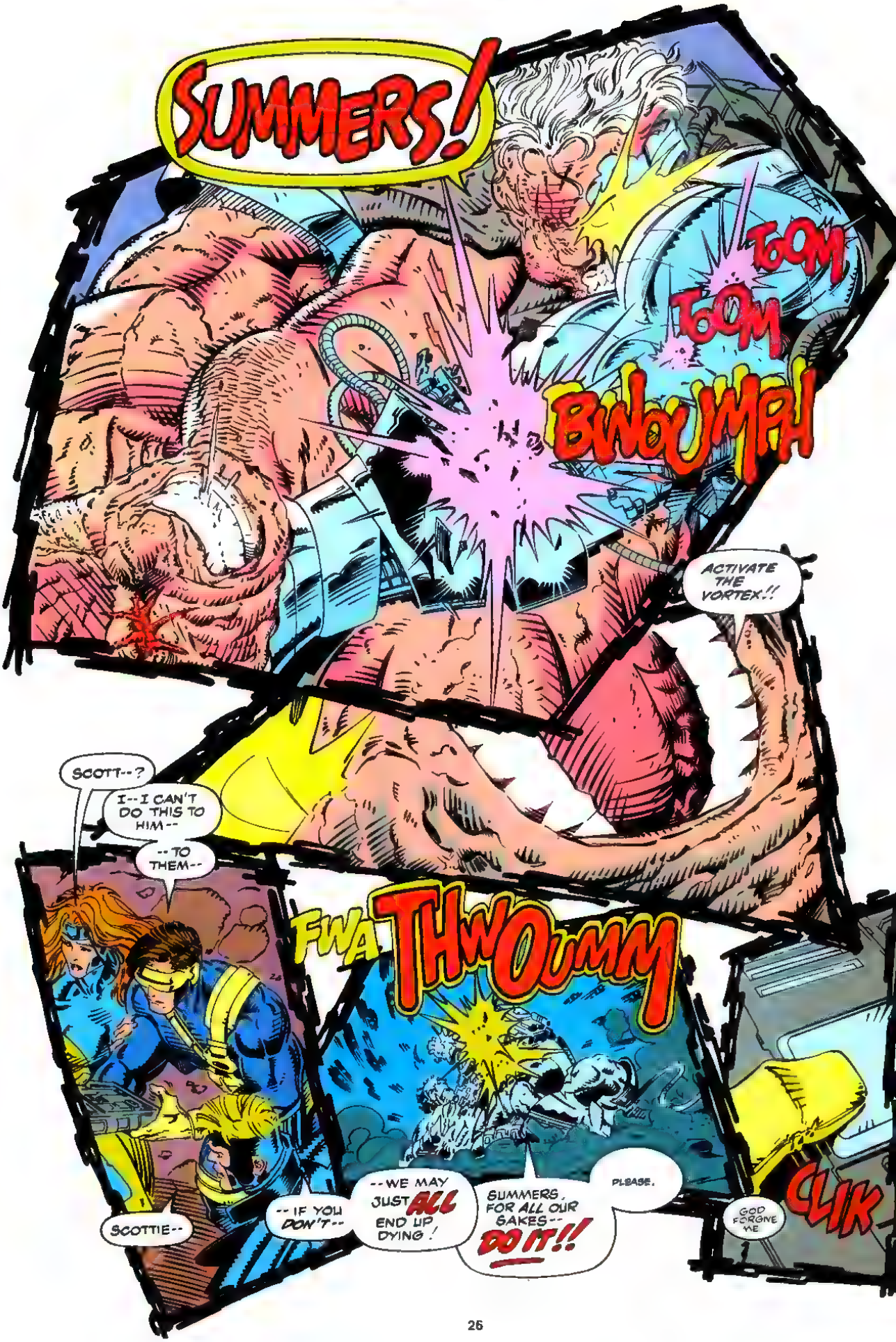

--I HAVE TO-- PUT AN END TO THIS --
--PUT AN END-- TO STRYFE--
--PUT AN END-- TO ME--
CHIKT

--GRAB HOLD OF THIS--
--HIT THE ENGAGE BUTTON--

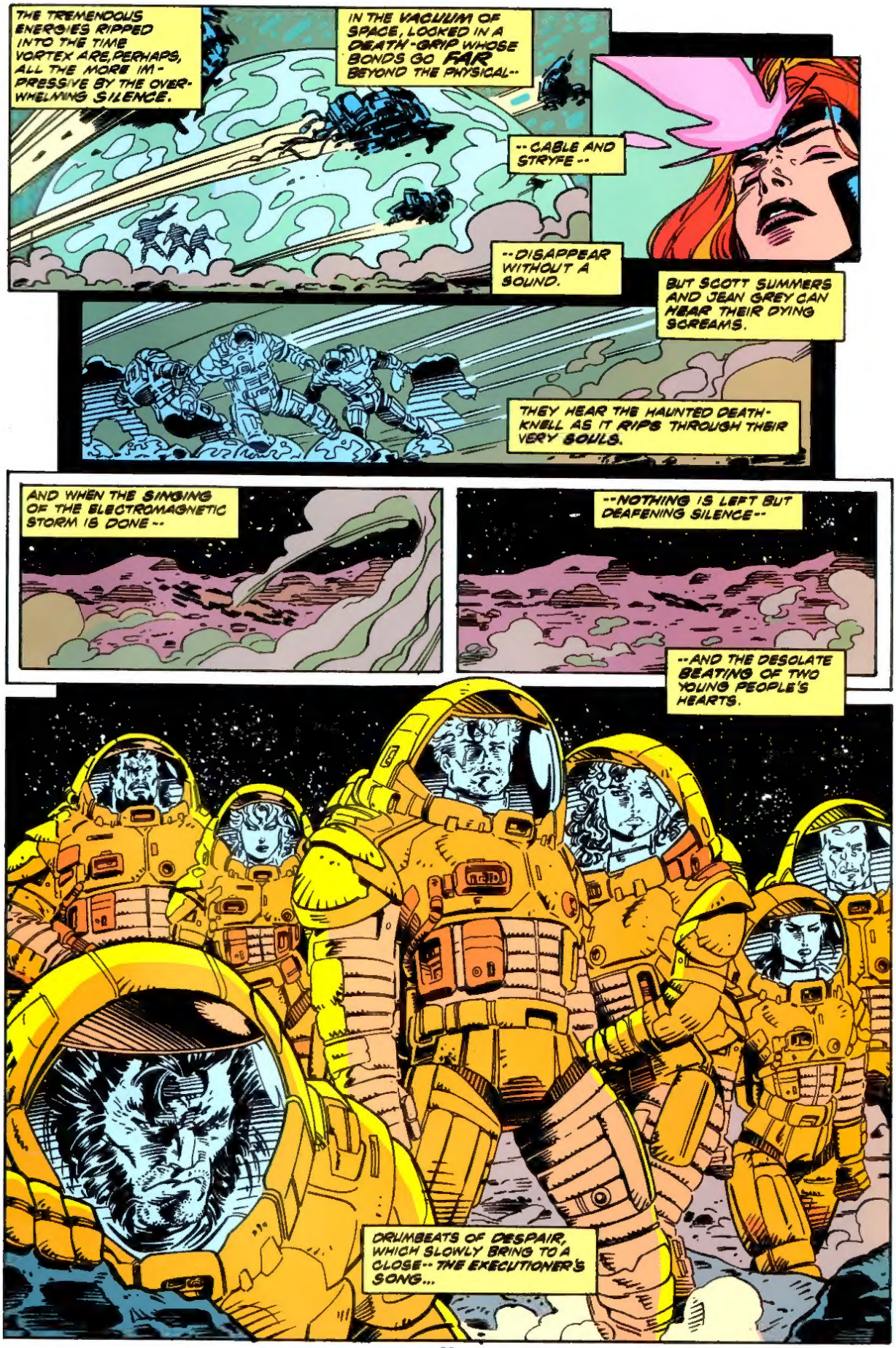
GOT IT. WHAT IS IT, CABLE?
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT PLANNED?


YOU'LL KNOW, SUMMERS...
...BELIEVE ME. YOU'LL KNOW.
WAIT--! CABLE--! WAIT!
IT'S TOO LATE FOR WAITING. IT'S TOO LATE FOR A LOT OF THINGS.
DO WHAT YOU CAN TO SURVIVE.
STRYFE--
I SAID IT BEFORE-- --I'LL SAY IT AGAIN--
TIME'S UP!
NO! I WILL NOT BE UNDONE BY A FEEBLE COPY OF MYSELF!
THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, STRYFE--
--I'VE ALWAYS BEEN MY OWN MAN--
--MADE MY OWN CHOICES--
--AND I CHOOSE TO KILL YOU NOW!
CHER
AUTO-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE ACTIVATED: T-MINUS 25 SECONDS


GOOD LORD! DID YOU SEE--?!
HE ACTIVATED A SELF-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE!
SCOTT, I CAN'T GET A READING ON EITHER OF THEM!
MUST BE TOO MUCH E.M. ACTIVITY FOR YOUR TELEPATHY, JEAN.
NO, IT'S BECAUSE OF THE TIME-FLUX ENERGIES.
T-MINUS 15 SECONDS
BUT WHAT DOES THIS DEVICE HE GAVE ME HAVE TO DO WITH EITHER THE TIME-FLUX OR HIS SELF-DESTRUCT?
UNLESS--CABLE WANTS THE THREE TO WORK IN UNISON?
T-MINUS 10 SECONDS
SUMMERS--
BUT IF I DO WHAT HE WANTS AND ACTIVATE THIS--
--IT'S GOING TO KILL HIM, ISN'T IT?
T-MINUS 5 SECONDS
CABLE--
--DON'T ASK ME TO DO THIS.
--HIT IT!
SELF-DESTRUCT ENGAGED


SUMMERS!
BOOM
BOOM
BWOUMPH
ACTIVATE THE VORTEX!!
SCOTT--?
I--I CAN'T DO THIS TO HIM--
--TO THEM--
FWA
THWOUMM
SCOTTIE--
--IF YOU DON'T--
--WE MAY JUST ALL END UP DYING!
SUMMERS, FOR ALL OUR SAKES--
DO IT!!
PLEASE.
GOD FORGIVE ME
CLIK

FUZZEE
SHWOUMMMMM
HE WASN'T AFRAID.
HE KNEW THIS WAS RIGHT.
THWROUMM
THWROUMM
THWROUMM
SO I LET HIM GO...
...AGAIN...
CABLE...


THE TREMENDOUS ENERGIES RIPPED INTO THE TIME VORTEX ARE, PERHAPS, ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE BY THE OVERWHELMING SILENCE.
IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE, LOCKED IN A DEATH-GRIP WHOSE BONDS GO FAR BEYOND THE PHYSICAL--
--CABLE AND STRYFE--
--DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A SOUND.
BUT SCOTT SUMMERS AND JEAN GREY CAN HEAR THEIR DYING SCREAMS.
THEY HEAR THE HAUNTED DEATH-KNELL AS IT RIPS THROUGH THEIR VERY SOULS.
AND WHEN THE SINGING OF THE ELECTROMAGNETIC STORM IS DONE--
--NOTHING IS LEFT BUT DEAFENING SILENCE--
--AND THE DESOLATE BEATING OF TWO YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEARTS.
DRUMBEATS OF DESPAIR, WHICH SLOWLY BRING TO A CLOSE-- THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG...

CABLE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING--
-- THE EQUIPMENT HE WAS CARRYING FOCUSED THE ENERGIES OF THE TIME-VORTEX THROUGH IT--
-- AND HIS SELF-DESTRUCTION OPENED THE RIFT NEEDED TO BRING STRYFE DOWN.
FUNNY, THE WHOLE THING STARTED WITH US THINKING CABLE WAS A MURDERER... BUT IN THE END, HE TURNED OUT TO BE OUR ONLY HOPE.
HE WAS THAT. IN ORDER TO SAVE US ALL--
-- WE HAD TO SACRIFICE HIM...
... A SECOND TIME.
SCOTT-- NO-- YOU DON'T THINK...
I DON'T KNOW, JEAN.
I DON'T KNOW IF WE'LL EVER BE SURE.
"BUT I DO KNOW THIS...
"... I'M GOING TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE THINKING ABOUT TODAY... THINKING ABOUT HIM AND WONDERING...
"... GOD HELP ME, I'LL NEVER STOP WONDERING."

AS THE OLD SONG DIES...
A RUSTIC FARMHOUSE IN NEBRASKA...
FSSSSSSSSSS
I'VE PSIONICALLY OPENED THE CANNISTER!
SIR -- IT IS EMPTY!
CURSE STRYFE'S BLOOD!
I WAS PROMISED THE SUMMERS' FAMILY GENETIC MATERIAL!
HMMPH. SHOULD I BE SURPRISED?
KAFF KAFF
HAUGFF
IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED.
WE PROCEED, AS EVER, ONWARDS, TOWARD TOMORROW.
OH, AND GORDON--
--PLEASE DO LOOK AFTER THAT COUGH...
...A NEW CHORUS BEGINS...